

# Indiana House of Representatives

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## News and Information

*Media Office*

*Democratic Caucus*

*John Schorg, Director*

*Statehouse, Room 157*

*Indianapolis, Indiana 46204*

*1-800-382-9842 or 1-317-232-9621*

*Fax Number: 1-317-232-9792*

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### **STATEHOUSE REPORT FROM REP. DAVE CROOKS**

INDIANAPOLIS – As we enter the second month of the 2005 session of the Indiana General Assembly, there is a great deal of activity throughout the Statehouse.

I'm sure you've seen the news about the governor's latest proposal to reduce funding for Indiana schools, a move that could cause program cuts, larger class sizes and teacher layoffs. The Indiana Department of Education has said that it will not make deficiency support payments to school corporations, starting as early as March, and that it was highly unlikely that the administration would make up the lost funding.

This decision amounts to a \$52 million cut in state support for local schools by the end of this calendar year. It follows the governor's proposal to "flat-line" school funding in the new biennial state budget, a move that translates to another cut in support and the likely increase of local property taxes.

These are real cuts in funding for schools. Historically, we have set aside money in the state budget for these deficiency payments because the school funding formula provides only a 'snapshot' of enrollment in our schools. Through these deficiency payments, we make sure that schools get the funding that was promised. By refusing to make these payments, the administration is failing to live up to that promise.

By cutting funding to schools, the administration is telling local officials that they must make up the lost dollars on their own. They will be forced to make cuts in programs and personnel. That means larger class sizes, fewer teachers and fewer extracurricular programs – exactly the things that will reverse recent improvements seen in our state's educational system.

I will do everything in my power to make sure that schools get the funds promised to them, and help them avoid the loss of support that can lead to program cuts, teacher layoffs and higher property taxes.

I also must mention an effort to supposedly reduce the size of government that could reduce citizen involvement in the process. The governor wants to eliminate most of the more than 300 statutory boards and commissions currently in existence in Indiana.

A measure outlining that goal (House Bill 1188) was changed by the House Government and Regulatory Reform Committee to make sure there is a thorough review of the effectiveness of all of those groups before any recommendations are made on eliminating them.

It always is good to make government leaner and more efficient. I believe it is wrong to eliminate boards and commissions simply to be getting rid of them, because many of these groups have helped enact legislation that has benefitted numerous people in Indiana. It sounds funny that Indiana has an egg board, until you realize this group brings together farmers, retailers and consumer representatives to make sure that our state provides the best possible product.

Under consideration for possible elimination are such groups as the Commission on Aging, the Commission for a Drug-Free Indiana, the Commission on Autism, the State Board of Education, the Commission on Mental Health, the Kids First Trust Board, the State Fair Advisory Board, the Workers Compensation Board of Indiana, and boards that help oversee

Indiana's Schools for the Blind and Deaf.

Remember that most of these boards and commissions are made up of average citizens, like you and me. It seems strange for our governor to continually talk about getting the public more involved in government when he wants to drastically cut down one of the ways that Hoosiers actually can take part.

PHONE DEREGULATION – Members of the House Technology, Research and Development Committee heard testimony on a plan that would free major local telephone service providers from state regulations and pricing caps after 2010. A vote has not been set on House Bill 1518, but this measure has the potential to be one of the most controversial to be considered during the 2005 session.

Supporters of the measure – which include SBC , Verizon and Sprint, as well as the Indiana Chamber of Commerce and the Indiana AFL-CIO – say it will spur more investment in telecommunications technology and broadband services, and help provide new products and services at lower prices.

Opponents of House Bill 1518 – which include the AARP, the Citizens Action Coalition and United Senior Action – say it will remove any state regulatory control over telephone service and lead to large rate increases for consumers, particularly those on fixed incomes. I agree with these citizens groups on the long-term effect on telephone costs and services in rural areas like ours if this bill becomes law.

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